

## Give our regards to International Boulevard

MAY 14 1996

Something happened last week that may transform 136 blocks in Oakland stretching from Lake Merritt to the San Leandro border. Then again, it may not. *Sheila*  
Oakland City Council members voted 7-2 to change the name of East 14th Street to International Boulevard. Well . . . it wasn't exactly changed. Merged would be a better way to describe what happened.

Now the name for the street — at least for three years — will be International Boulevard/East 14th Street. At the end of three years, the council members, whoever they are at that time, will decide whether the name should stick. If they are looking for another name then, they might try calling it South 14th Street, which more accurately describes its direction.

The name just adopted is a bit awkward, having five words and more than 10 syllables, so maybe International Boulevard/East 14th Street could be shortened to a sound bite. It will take some inventive mind to do it.

What about amnesty for those sections of International Boulevard also known as East 14th Street in the Fruitvale business district? Merchants there who are working well toward renewal like calling it East 14th Street. Most think it's a grand old name. That could be why Council member Ignacio De La Fuente, who represents the Fruitvale, voted against any change, and was supported by his ally, Council member Sheila Jordan, whose North Oakland district doesn't include any of the street.

Council member Dezie Woods-Jones, who represents Elmhurst, where East 14th Street is a main thoroughfare, came up with the idea to change the street's name to Interna-

tional Boulevard. She had good support from some quarters, but there also was a backlash against the change. And there was cynical disinterest by those who called it a public relations ploy to make it appear East 14th Street wasn't the same old street with the same old problems.

Woods-Jones maintains the street change will be accompanied by a program that will revitalize vacant storefronts and establish a "gateway sign" at 73rd Avenue and International Boulevard near the Oakland International Airport. Fortunately, she dropped the idea that the long street have ethnic identifications by district after there was an outcry against the implied segregation.

Among the many speakers at the council meeting who opposed the change was Donna Glover, who said, "Change what the problem is, do not add a coat of paint to it."

On the other hand, Woods-Jones may be right. Maybe this will be a start toward transformation. We hope so because East 14th Street, aka International Boulevard, needs a lot of change.

For starters, the street itself is a washboard — why not transform it with a mundane resurfacing job? Surely, if the city can find \$30,000 to finance a name change, it can find money to do something genuinely superficial.

Say, if changing the name of East 14th Street actually creates new life and prosperity along the strip, some council member might try to change the image of downtown by giving Broadway a new name.

We can just imagine the emotional response that proposal would evoke, so we'll go on the record right now as being against it.



# City Council

MAY 8 1996

## paves way for change

### E. 14th Street is reluctantly renamed International Blvd.

By Diana Williams  
and Elizabeth Goodwin

STAFF WRITERS

**OAKLAND** — E. 14th Street was rechristened International Boulevard Tuesday night by a decidedly unenthusiastic City Council, which acknowledged the move is not a cure for problems plaguing the commercial strip. *STREET*

During the next few months, Oakland will spend \$30,000 to erect new signs along E. 14th Street's 136 blocks, stretching from Lake Merritt to San Leandro. The street will have two sets of signs reflecting both names for three years, when the council will evaluate whether E. 14th Street should be dropped altogether.

For years, the city has considered giving E. 14th Street a new identification. One proposal was to dedicate it after Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, and another would have honored the late labor leader Cesar Chavez.

The change passed Tuesday by a 7-2 vote, was spearheaded by City Council member Dezie Woods-Jones, who represents one of the four council districts traversed by E. 14th.

"We saw this as a catalyst for stimulating economic revitalization," she said. "The tendency of people is to say, 'What is changing the name going to do?' But I believe it will help us."

In conjunction with the name change, Oakland is planning a "shopsteading" program in East Oakland to fix up vacant storefronts, she said.

Money for other revitalization efforts is available from the federal Enhanced Enterprise Community fund, and the Coliseum Redevelopment Area.

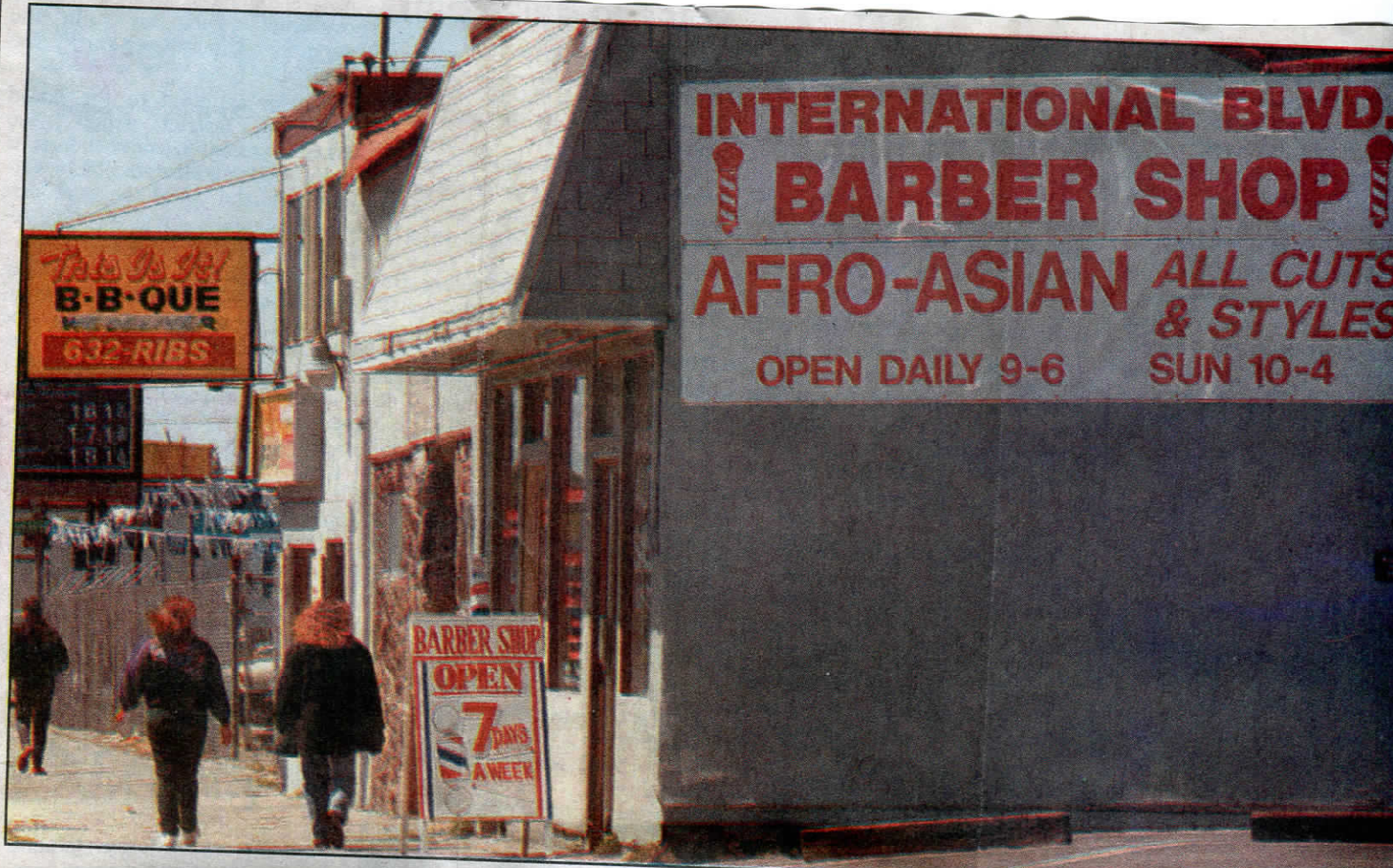
The city is also considering a "gateway" sign at 73rd Avenue and International Boulevard, near the Oakland International Airport, with markers noting the distance from that point to foreign cities such as Paris.

"It's a marketing tool," said Eric Mitchell, an aide to Woods-Jones.

Others see it wasting money.

"Change what the problem is, do not add a coat of paint to it," East Oakland resident Donna Glover told the council. "Change the business owners who continue to let people drink in front of their establishments."





The barber shop at E. 14th Street and 67th Avenue in East Oakland already considers itself "International."

RON RIESTERER — Staff

# Lukewarm goodbye to E. 14th Street

International Boulevard is new name — 'Why not?'

By Diana M. Williams  
STAFF WRITER

**OAKLAND** — It was supposed to be a celebration of Oakland's diversity, a street name everyone could rally around. But the enthusiasm never materialized, and when the City Council voted this week to change E. 14th Street to International Boulevard, the rationale boiled down to "Why not?"

That lukewarm endorsement was best summed up by Mayor Elihu Harris, who after a protracted debate Tuesday night said bluntly, "I don't know that I'm particularly excited about this," and urged his colleagues to get the vote over with. The council passed the \$30,000 plan in a 7-2 vote.

"What does it hurt?" said Council member John Russo (Grand Lake-Chinatown),

echoing the mayor's ambivalence. "It will cost more than \$30,000 to keep arguing over this."

The idea of giving E. 14th Street a new name emerged several years ago during an "economic summit" in East Oakland. Participants were searching for a way to market Oakland's diversity while giving a boost to the 136-block strip's shabby image.

Community meetings were held, a plan was drafted, and around March 19, just as Councilmember Dezie Woods-Jones (Elmhurst-East Oakland Hills) was scheduled to present the proposal to the full council, it was pulled back for more discussion.

Politics may have had something to do with that. Woods-Jones was running for office at the time against Don Perata, who beat her March 26 for the Democratic nomination to the Assembly. Some say Woods-Jones was hoping to get a political boost from International Boulevard, a charge Woods-Jones denies. But the name-change issue was derailed from the March agenda in part because of Councilmember Ignacio De La Fuente, one of Perata's staunchest supporters.

On Tuesday, Councilmembers De La Fuente (San Antonio-Fruitvale) and Sheila Jordan (North Oakland) voted against the new name, saying their offices had been flooded by callers who object to spending \$30,000 for a cosmetic change.

"I don't think renaming the street will make any difference," said De La Fuente, implying the move was driven by Woods-Jones more than the community.

"I won't even dignify that ... with a response," retorted Woods-Jones.

Several East Oakland activists testified on behalf of the name change, saying it was a first step toward bringing attention to the sagging commercial strip.

"I have seen E. 14th Street go through great decline," said J. Alfred Smith Jr., whose father is the well-known pastor of Allen Temple Baptist Church.

"We need to put an end to naysayers," he

Please see **Street** A-14



# Reflecting diversity

...from A-13

said, and make whatever moves the city can to help East Oakland.

Politics aside, the reworked version was significantly watered down. Jettisoned was a controversial plan to divide E. 14th Street into four ethnically identified areas — an idea supporters said was a tribute to the street's natural ethnicities but others saw as divisive. The council also voted to make the name change temporary for three years — contingent on community reaction.

"I don't think this idea will bring about a startling renaissance or revitalization," said Councilmember Nate Miley (Eastmont-

Seminary). "But if we can come back and evaluate this in three years, I'm comfortable with it."

The proposal will affect about 892 properties. The old and new street names will remain posted along E. 14th Street for three years; then the council will revisit the success of International Boulevard and decide whether it should be permanent. Eventually, the city will install flags representing countries such as Mexico and China. One critic at the council meeting said he was offended by the name "International" because it implied that the collection of different ethnicities was not American. "Why don't you call it 'Our Street'?" he asked.



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## Name partly true

**T**HE Oakland street now to be known as International Boulevard is a nursery for budding businesses run by ambitious newcomers from Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and other compass points. The awnings over their bantam restaurants and corner grocery stores are as bright as their futures, as fresh as their street-front produce.

This is not to say the former E. 14th Street is not getting an infusion of old American blood.

Down in the 6600 block, Willie Thomas, 65, an East Bay resident since 1957 when the stretch of E. 14th Street through central and east Oakland was part of a thriving artery running up and down the spine of the East Bay, has hung a sign on his new business that proudly says, "International Boulevard Barber Shop."

Willie got the jump on everybody from the city council on down. He set up shop, his second on E. 14th, after the first of the year, knowing success never comes easy on a street where businesses come and go like the 82 bus.

"Me and my wife put all our effort into it," he said. "We're scraping pennies, but I'm still here. When you work from the heart, success will come. It all depends on the individual. You have to believe."

You have to believe that this street, forever being rebuilt with hope, faith and sweat, is a glimpse of what America is still all about — enterprise and opportunity.

But there's another snapshot to be taken of E. 14th Street, from 1st Avenue to the San Leandro border. The picture shows a tired, old bag lady of a boulevard, bent and bowed by the advent of malls and suburban flight, beaten and bruised by the ascent of drugs and crime.

This is the picture nobody seems able to do anything about but change the street signs. The city council could have given E. 14th Street any number of monikers, all of them accurate, none of them flattering. Abandoned Avenue works. Fingernail Row does, too.

**I** say that having driven up the 136 blocks of International Boulevard from San Leandro Wednesday, taking stock of the businesses that line the street. Don't



hold me to the count. It was hard enough trying not to swap bumpers in traffic, so I might have missed a liquor store or two.

Closed-up store-fronts: 141

Store-front churches: 35

Fingernail salons: 19

Liquor stores: 17

Check-cashing establishments: 9

Bars: 6

Pawn shops: 2

Banks: 2

Palm readers: 1

Major supermarkets: 0

The numbers tell a story. Namely that on International Boulevard you can praise the Lord, have your nails done and drown your sorrows easier than you can find a Safeway or a Lucky's.

It's also easier to get ripped off than to find a Wells Fargo or a Great Western. That's why the city could have named it Incarcerated Corridor. It would explain the dozens of small businesses locked behind grates and iron bars.

But why bother with security gates if you can't tell the customers from the crooks? Some months ago at Sayfee's Hardware, 10226 E. 14th St., two *enfants terrible*, from the neighborhood no less, walked in and bopped the owner on the head. C'est la vie on 911 Street.

The council also could have called it Enterprise Lane. On second thought, it might be confusing since enterprise has so many forms nowadays. For example, as I waited for a light to change, a bum came up to my window and tried to sell me a tattered Thomas Guide map book.

**N**O wonder he didn't want it — it's now obsolete. Map makers must hate it when street names get changed. It **must** be an adjustment for cops, fire-fighters and ambulance dispatchers, not to mention a hassle for anybody with E. 14th Street on a business card.

Still, Willie Thomas of the International Boulevard Barber Shop is one of those who believes the name change is good.

"It's great," he said. "It's not going to change the activities that go on in Oakland, but it might bring in some new ideas."

Free Berlitz books would be good. Across from the old Montgomery Ward store, the rubble that stands like a building, I parked and walked over to a boulevardier at a bus stop.

I asked him what he thought of the name International Boulevard.

We didn't understand each other. The Asian gentleman didn't speak my language. I didn't speak his.



JUN 18 1996

*Five is up*

# SIGNS OF THE TIMES



*Street*

Oakland Councilmembers Dezie Woods-Jones (Elmhurst-East Oakland Hills) and Henry Chang (At-Large) help unveil the new International Boulevard signs along E. 14th Street. For the next three years, both signs will

be used on the corridor stretching from 1st Avenue to the San Leandro border. Woods-Jones views the new name as a catalyst for change that will have a positive influence on the whole area.



# Fruitvale District has lots to celebrate

OCT 29 1996  
By Kathleen Kirkwood  
STAFF WRITER

STREET

OAKLAND — Merchants and neighbors of International Boulevard have two reasons to celebrate this weekend.

First, their Fruitvale District was recently tapped to be one of six "National Neighborhood Main Streets" around the country.

That means the federal government will be providing several thousand dollars over the next four years to spruce up and revitalize the district.

Second, "Dia de los Muertos," the traditional Mexican festival of the dead, will be observed Saturday with entertainment and contests in the heart of the district.

And just for good measure, famous local heroes of the Fruitvale District, such as Oakland A's pitcher Dave Stewart and photographer Imogen Cunningham, will be

honored. Organizers are hinting that Stewart may even appear as a guest.

"This is something of a coming-out party for the Fruitvale District," said Darlene Rios Drapkin,

Main Street manager for the Spanish Speaking Unity Council. "We're positioning ourselves for a major revitalization."

The party starts at 11 a.m. Saturday, at the corner of International Boulevard (formerly East 14th Street) and 33rd Avenue. Trick-or-treat and costume contests for children take place from 12:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. Mariachis and Dia de los Muertos dancers also will provide entertainment.

Two nearby projects, a planned transit village at the Fruitvale BART station and the Del Monte Cannery Shopping Center on Ninth Street and Fruitvale Avenue, are expected to help galvanize the diverse

area.

For years, Fruitvale — and especially East 14th Street — have grappled with economic problems, crime and a downtrodden appearance.

Many buildings need painting, awnings are ripped and signs are barely standing.

Safety bars and gates cover most storefronts, almost obstructing merchandise from view, banks are hard to find and streets and sidewalks always look dirty.

But the district's strong

points — a sense of community and diverse cultural offerings — can't be found in any other place in the East Bay, said Jay Blumer, owner of Fruitvale Produce.

Blumer said he's betting on the district's revitalization.

"The people here are very family oriented. The area doesn't really live up to its reputation," said Blumer, who opened his produce stand two years ago.

He repainted the storefront in bright yellows, reds and oranges. Other storefronts are following suit, gradually changing the block.

"I could have taken my money and put it into a storefront on Piedmont Avenue. I chose to locate here because of all the activity," said Blumer, referring to the new shopping center, which will include a Lucky supermarket and other major stores.

Please see **Festival, A-7**

**“I could have taken my money and put it into a storefront on Piedmont Avenue. I chose to locate here because of all the activity.”**

**Jay Blumer**

owner of Fruitvale Produce



He is hoping the Main Street project can help bring more trees and greenery along the main thoroughfares, Fruitvale Avenue and International Boulevard, and that more free parking might be provided.

### **Needs makeover**

But Blumer and many other merchants say their business district needs nothing less than a makeover

to draw back those who are taking their business to shopping malls.

"The owners of the buildings are not taking care of them properly," said Hafiz Nabizad, manager of Yelda's Kids Fashions. "The buildings need painting; this one is an ugly yellow. The awnings need to be repaired."

### **Community emphasized**

A few storefronts down, Fashions For All owner David

Assar said increased patrols would help ease shoppers' and merchants' anxiety about security.

### **Wouldn't trade atmosphere**

Despite that, Assar and many others say they wouldn't trade the community-like atmosphere of International Boulevard for a shopping mall.

"People are very friendly here. You can talk freely. We look out for each other."